Birdtrack – COMPACFLT's Requisition and Asset Visibility Tool

By Meredith Omura

Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT), strategically located between the U.S. mainland and the western edge of the Pacific theater, supports a large forward-deployed naval force. COMPACFLT's challenge is to optimize material positioning and requisition fulfillment while maintaining fleet readiness for its area of responsibility, which includes Japan, Guam and South Korea. COMPACFLT is also providing assistance to the Marine air and ground components in Iraq and Afghanistan.

COMPACFLT's solution was to develop an inventory positioning analysis and asset visibility tool aimed at speeding the flow of replacement parts to ships and forward-deployed activities throughout the Pacific and Southwest Asia. This automated supply-chain management application named Birdtrack, originally developed to track average customer wait times for replacement parts, now includes a number of decision-making tools.

Before the development of Birdtrack, COMPACFLT used a spreadsheet to manually track its customer wait times. However, this process grew so unwieldy that automation was necessary. The manual version of Birdtrack was developed in 2000 to help determine how COMPACFLT was going to provide logistics support to units that operated in or deployed to the Pacific Fleet. The old spreadsheet version of the tool measured delivery times and yields from inception of the requisition through each pass point in the supply chain, helping to optimize the placement of material for use by forces in the theater.

In analyzing logistics support, the fleet supply team looked at up-front processing time, starting from when the requisition was generated to when it was recognized by the system, issue processing timeframes and transportation time from the issuing point to the end user. Finally they considered the time from when the part was received at the end user's location to when the user reported that it had been received. In this analysis, the team identified concentric circles of activity related to requisitions: shipboard activities in the center, shore-based activities close to the requisition point in the next ring, materials flowing from other Navy locations in the next ring and materials supported through the Defense Logistics Agency and General Services Administration in the outer ring.

A cohesive team headed by Capt. Thomas Traaen, director for Fleet Supply, COMPACFLT, in partnership with Naval Supply Information Systems Activity (NAVSISA) Customer Support Group Pearl Harbor, began work on the automated version of Birdtrack in May 2003. In just six months, the team had a proof-of-concept version in place that enabled users to make confident decisions.

In February 2004, COMPACFLT used the tool to identify logistics support provided by four Fleet Industrial Supply Centers located in Pearl Harbor, Yokosuka, San Diego and Puget Sound, as well as support provided by other sources of supply within the Department of Defense (DoD) and by DoD prime vendors. Additionally, Birdtrack recommended material that could be repositioned to provide improved customer support and responsiveness.

The Oracle-based application runs on commercial-off-the-shelf hardware and software. The hardware and software infrastructure has proven so flexible that the development team has been able to enhance it on an as-required basis. One set of users, for example, wanted to manage selected types of inventory. They provided a file of the inventory they wanted to manage, and the team provided them with the capability to categorize stock numbers of items, giving them a high-level view of item usage. The submarine and surface ship community wanted to track the various items being sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, how often they were sent, and how long it was taking to get the items there. The team categorized these requisitions to provide requisition analysis and material positioning information.

The high-level view of inventory usage, provided by Birdtrack, provides more sophisticated decision-making capabilities. This has enabled COMPACFLT to recommend strategic positioning of replacement parts at a lower cost and at a faster rate than previously done. When a fighting unit in Iraq needed parts in six days, COMPACFLT, using Birdtrack, measured the average customer wait time for the parts at approximately 18 days. Birdtrack then showed how that time could be reduced to less than six days by stocking line items in theater.

Recently, COMPACFLT used Birdtrack to respond to the December 2004 tsunami disaster. It tracked relief materials to better anticipate workload and monitor backlogs. According to Traaen, "Getting the parts to the ultimate user in six days, as opposed to 18 days, has a massive impact on unit readiness and minimizes disruption to the planned operational tempo."

The capabilities of Birdtrack will be the springboard for leveraging the Logistics Distance Support strategy toward greater efficiencies and increased business process improvements in support of the Navy's Human Capital Strategy. Additionally, Birdtrack capabilities are being considered as a means to support the strategic realignment and requirements of the joint services toward achieving their long-range goals.

The continuing use of Birdtrack to track, manage and provide the high-level view of item usage and inventory will result in a fleet that is ready for any challenge, any time, any place.

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